



Ricochet River

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Set in a fictional Oregon town in the late 1960s, Cody's superlative coming-of-age novel is the story of Wade, Lorna and Jesse--teenagers preparing to break out of their small-town lives. Wade is the local sports hero. Jesse is his friend, a mythical athlete and the Indian kid who applies his own rules to sports and life. And Lorna is Wade's sweetheart who knows there's no hope in Calamus for a bright, independent girl. The river rushes past the town, linking the three friends with their pasts, their plans and the world beyond. This new edition from the author addresses issues of graphic language and sex that thwarted the book's use in high schools.

Ricochet River Details

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Author : Robin Cody

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From Reader Review Ricochet River for online ebook

Ari Mathae says

As a lifelong Oregonian, this book hit me close to home. Cody really captured something specific about small, rural towns in this state. There's a particular way of doing things, and the people who don't really fit in struggle the most and face a lot of discrimination.

With the narrator's voice being the town's star athlete, a young white boy on the edge of the rest of his life, it's difficult sometimes to see where the dark stereotyping of the town ends and the commentary on it begins. The book is largely about the protagonist's friend Jesse, a young Native man, and how he sticks out like a sore thumb in the town. Sometimes he takes on the dumb but noble archetype, and, while I think it's the author's commentary on stereotyping and bias, it's not always clear enough.

The book really captures small-town Oregon in a unique way and has some captivating characters, such as the protagonist's girlfriend Lorna, a girl with a snaggletooth who wants to escape the town.

Stephanie says

As a relatively new resident of Oregon, I hunger for books that give me insights into the state, and while I appreciated the coming-of-age story in Ricochet River, the aspect of the novel that stood out most for me was its powerful and often heartbreakingly representation of the evolving physical and cultural landscape of the state.

The story is set in a small, fading mill town called Calamus, a fictionalization of Estacada, where author Robin Cody grew up. Driving through towns like this, I've always wondered about them — who lives there, what they do, what they dream of doing? Even though the events in Ricochet River takes place over half a century ago, I feel as though I've been given a greater insight into those towns, and how they came to be the way they are.

But even more than that, I understand the physical environment of Oregon in a new and deeper way, thanks to Ricochet River. I've always taken the dams and bridges and human additions to our rivers as a given. But Cody makes me understand what was lost as a result of their construction. The indolent shrunken salmon, trapped upstream from the dams, evoke the devastation to wildlife; the tragedy of Jesse Howl shows the loss of ancient cultural traditions, with nothing promising to take their place. Jesse has a powerful ambidextrous pitching style, because he grew up learning how to throw spears at fish with either arm; in the modernizing world, that fishing skill is no longer of any value, but even Jesse's baseball prowess is less appreciated than Wade's.

Traveling around Oregon, I see it differently thanks to this book, and to me that alone is a great reason to recommend Ricochet River.

Sadie Rose Verville (aroseforbooks) says

This book surprised me. From the start, it was really quality writing, and the plot was fairly interesting. But the more I got into it, the more I got the sense of it being something bigger than itself. It gave me the same kind of feelings as *The Outsiders*, with the 50's-60's era teens just trying to survive high school and societal expectations. While these kids are stuck in a way-back town in a very typical high school setting, you start to get the sense that even with all the clicks and groups and 'boxes,' the biggest thing for young adults and teens is to just know that they are individuals, not just part of another box. This book really amazed me, and the ending was moving. Make sure to stick it out all the way through!

Amanda says

Robin Cody's *Ricochet River* serves as stunning representation of what it means to be a teenager. Each character's struggles to come of age in a Pacific Northwest small town are unique but equally poignant, and I found myself most connected to Lorna as she navigated her identity so authentically, struggling to balance love, family, friendship, school, and connection to home and roots. This anniversary edition through Ooligan Press challenges censorship and what it means to most authentically represent the community which you purport to represent, and does so in a beautifully designed, educationally-focused manner (with teaching guide and all). This is a text that will excellently serve any high school classroom and which teenagers and adults alike will love deeply. Cody's novel will inspire readers to challenge themselves and each other to be better, do better, and live better lives.

Mike says

Why do I get the sense that I'm reading a high school text book? Well, for starters, the 25th edition proudly proclaims that the new edition is "suitable for use in high schools". Then there is the advertisement in the back of the book for the author's "in-depth Discussion Guide" that has questions such as, "What is the literary purpose of the short chapter lead-ins?" I was starting to think that every literary device in the book existed just to be explained to high school writing students! Even the production of the book was an assignment for writing students (albeit University level). It was an OK story, but I couldn't relate well to any of the characters, didn't find the story believable, and the whole river thing is becoming overdone.

Emily says

Ricochet River is a character study from the point of view of golden-boy Wade Cullen, a senior in high school in fictional Calamus, Oregon, from a privileged family. Through Wade's young, rule-following eyes, we see the struggles of two outsiders: his restless girlfriend, Lorna, and their friend, Jesse, an American Indian who has the nerve to be himself in a community who refuses to accept him. Both Jesse and Lorna are more talented than Wade in their own ways, but Wade sees their marginalization as inevitable based on their inability to play by the "rules." Wade's greatest threats and pressures is (very Oregonian) passive-aggressiveness from his family when he refuses to go to an East Coast college.

Robin Cody is a lyrical and thoughtful writer who manages to capture "Oregonness" in this novel (I'm referencing one of the comments Cody received in an early rejection letter for the book, described in the 25th anniversary edition's preface). There's a very specific type of what Lorna calls "viciousness" to not only small towns, but Oregon small towns in particular. Reading this in 2017, it's hard for me to think about much

else other than how badly Jesse is failed by his "allies"--Wade and Lorna--and especially by the adults in Calamus who suck up his athletic talents but do nothing to nurture him as a person. It's hard to differentiate between the character's entertainment value for the readers of this book and for the residents of Calamus who view him as little more than a curiosity at best.

I've heard this described as a nostalgic novel, but I would hate to think that anyone could read this and feel warmth. It would be like feeling a warm fuzzy after reading *Bridge to Teribithia*. Except worse.

Megan says

A charming, if slightly diffuse, coming of age story set on the Clackamas River in 1960s Oregon logging country. The writing is wonderful. It's like the YA version of David James Duncan's *The River Why* and the 20th century version of *Huckleberry Finn*. Some reviewers seem to take issue with representation and tokenism, particularly of Jesse Howl, the American Indian character. I don't disagree. It does seem problematic to be too accepting of portrayals of the colonized (along with all their implied and explicit stereotypes), written by the colonizers. Cody deals with this problem a little bit in the book, but not quite enough.

Gloria Mulvihill says

The foundation of this book is the traditional coming-of-age story with the jock, the pretty girl, and a token Native American boy named Jesse. Throw in the trials of high school life against a small-town setting complete with woods, a lake, and next-to-nothing to do and you have the backdrop for *Ricochet River*. The characters lack depth and instead seem to fall all-too-easily into the tropes that could be expected of a traditional YA book. Along with the appalling treatment of Jesse, Lorna's snaggle tooth is sexualized, or perhaps fetishized, in a way that distracts and seems unnecessary in the context of the story. Wade for example does not receive this type of treatment—while Jesse is portrayed as mystic or other, and Lorna is sexualized, Wade is just Wade—which, to be frank, makes him a very forgettable protagonist.

While I appreciate the strides made with the anniversary edition, including the additional teachers guides and discussion material, this doesn't change the fact that this book is racist and culturally insensitive in a way that I don't find makes valuable commentary or holds historical significance. It is baffling to me that after multiple editions with different publishers nothing was done to alleviate or correct this.

Brittney says

I think the best thing about this book is that it really captures the small town feel of rural Oregon. It felt familiar and real. Growing up in a town, definitely not as small as this, I kept nodding my head with the realization that yes, yes this is exactly what it's like.

My struggle, which I realize has everything to do with my growing and learning politically and socially the last few years, is the date in which it takes place. While I definitely realize 1960 to 2018 are vastly different

and that much of the language is dated, it also felt too close to home sometimes. In turn, I think this is exactly what books are supposed to do: challenge us, make us question familiarity, and, ultimately, form our own conclusions and beliefs based on the influences of the words we read.

Mona says

I love this book and the development of nature and nurture in this Oregon based fiction. I felt as if I knew these people, drove thru their town, tasted their tears.

I was happy to read this story aloud to my family in a car trip when my Boys were 10 and 13 they fussed at first than begged me to continue as we drove on vacation.

Robin Cook may never write another books as successful as this one but as Harper Lee once pointed out when asked why she did not write more, she answers something like isn't one enough? I also read his book Voyage of a summer sun and enjoyed it also.

I was very disappointed in Oregonians who censored this book from High School libraries when so much beauty could be exposed to young people, there was nothing that needed censored. Shame Shame!

Jeremy Hickerson says

Amazing and great story of life in a fictional small logging town near Oregon City, featuring Native American culture and the migration cycle of salmon.

Read this book.

I heard an interview w/ author Robin Cody on the radio recently. He told how he tried for 15 years to publish the story, until it finally got picked up. He had improved it a lot by that point. It is now in high school reading curriculum.

High-schooler Wade Curren's life is disrupted when Jesse Howl (yes Howl, as in howl like a wolf, or better, like a coyote) comes to town. Jesse is from the Warm Springs reservation and it turns out he's an amazing athlete. He quickly replaces Wade as starting pitcher on the baseball team.

All kinds of trouble comes about because of Jesse, as Wade gets to know him and becomes his friend, while Wade is trying to keep things going with his steady girlfriend Lorna. Woven through all this is a lost way of life (several lost ways of life) and the terrible end faced by the salmon because of the construction of all the dams.

Kento Ikeda says

Growing up in Oregon, I was always aware of how older generations had knowledge that not only I did not have, but that I was unlikely to grow up to have. Knowledge of local flora and fauna, the lay of the land, and a sense for local history that goes beyond knowledge of the sequence of events and their relations. So it's this angle of Ricochet River that I'm most sensitive to, the fear that modernization (I should pick a better word, as modernization implies inevitability, that there is but a single historical destination) perverts what we are by

limiting the ways in which we can grow. I've always blamed myself, because the loss of generational knowledge shouldn't be inevitable, and I've been aware that some effort on my part could help address some of the problem. But reading this novel, I've been aware too of how much of this loss is due to differences in the environment I grew up in versus those I've compared myself to, and because there often wasn't sufficient effort to bring me into these fields of knowledge for the end of my having an organic understanding of these fields.

I should say too that there's a nice chapter in this novel where an indigenous American character tries to relate their own culture and experiences to what is being discussed in class, and the teacher having no context for it, and seeing the comments as a distraction. It felt very familiar. I wondered why students speak in class. The first idea that occurs to me is that it is to share information with the instructor and other students. But it has to be more than that too, the student is reasserting their role in a dialectical relationship, reestablishing that the relationship is dialectical. The instructor is in a position of power, is in many ways an instrument of power, and the student will sometimes feel a need for affirmation, and sometimes a need for resistance. That's how it seems to me, anyways.

Sarah says

I bought this book while traveling in Oregon. It breaks my black authors streak, but I was looking for a book set in Oregon by an Oregonian author, and this coming of age story fit the bill. I started reading the book on the plane on the way home, but then chaos ensued.

For some reason I read the preface, which I normally never do. From the preface, I learned some startling facts about the book's publication history. It was originally published in 1992. The subsequent paper back edition was taught in schools, particularly in Oregon. Unfortunately, parents complained because Ricochet River features brief scenes of teens drinking and engaging in bumbling, awkward sexual activity. When the original printing press went out of business in 2002, the book disappeared. In 2004, the author approached Ooligan Press about publishing a FUCKING CENSORED version with all of the sex taken out in an effort to get it back into schools. What a fucking travesty. My edition, the special 25th anniversary edition published in 2017, left the book in its censored form.

After reading this in the preface, my initial reaction was to return it. I don't need a few uptight parents in Oregon telling me, an adult woman, what I can and can't read. But I was already on the plane, so getting back to the Portland bookstore was impossible. And, being captive on a plane for 5 hours, I had nothing else to do but read it. However, I am still VERY UPSET. I understand the author's 2004 predicament - let the book die or begrudgingly self-censor to give it a new life in schools. It is ridiculous that he had to make that choice. The parents who complained are not professional educators, writers or librarians. All they did was have unprotected sex that resulted in spawn, and they somehow believe that qualifies them to make curricular decisions????? Fucking idiots. School boards are spineless twats.

I finished the censored edition and then had to use library resources to request a copy of the first edition through inter-library loan. Thank you the fine staff at UMass Amherst for sending me the book, and the staff at my own institution for requesting, delivering and returning it. The fact that I had to use library and postal resources to read a few pages of teen sex and send the book back somehow feels more weird than if they had just left it in there, but that is what these irresponsible parents want.

What upsets me the most is that this new, 25th anniversary edition, PUBLISHED IN 2017, is still censored.

From 2004 to 2017, both the worlds of young adult literature and pornography changed dramatically. The YA industry exploded, proving there is a financial market outside of schools. Additionally, several authors have won some significant battles to keep banned books in schools. Most importantly, most teens now have 24 hour access to porn in their pocket. With porn being so ubiquitous, it is more important than ever that teens see honest, realistic portrayals of sex. When discussing the book's sex scene, Cody says, "The scene is comic and bungling and incomplete, but still- taken out of context and read aloud to the school board, that passage is trouble." But the context is what is so important! Free internet porn reduces sex to a five minute clip of people smashing - this book and others like it do the important work of putting sex in the context of a relationship and its emotional consequences. Wade, the male protagonist, specifically mentions how different and more difficult his sexual experience is than how sex is portrayed in film. While my rage is up, I would also like to note that in the beginning of the book, when asked about his and Lorna's sex life, Wade repeatedly says, "Lorna is not that kind of girl." As his views and experience with sex evolve, you see that Wade and Lorna can have sex while maintaining their relationship and it does not change "what kind of girl" she is. Without the sex, the idea that there are certain kinds of trashy girls who have sex, and that makes them worse, is left in place. Fucking outrageous. I could go on about how the book features condoms, cunnilingus and other parts of the teen sexual experience missing from porn, but it doesn't matter to those fucking moronic parents.

ANYWAY, given that the world of YA literature is so much more open, WHY NOT USE THE OPPORTUNITY OF A 25TH EDITION TO RESTORE THE BOOK TO ITS ORIGINAL TEXT????? That is what I want to know. Why are my complaints and needs less valid than those of some completely ridiculous parents in Portland? I'm sure many English teachers and librarians would have advocated for it. This country is so stupid.

Also, be forewarned, this book will make you want to eat salmon every day, so have some on hand.

jeremy says

robin cody's *ricochet river* generated some mild controversy earlier last decade when some parents of a local school district attempted to have the book banned (on the spurious claims of age-inappropriate sexual themes & profanity). like many banned and censored works, *ricochet river* is a coming-of-age tale that narrates the requisite emotional awakening and sexual maturing of its teenage characters. set in 1960's calamus, a fictional oregon logging town near portland, the story follows three friends yearning for something greater than their small town could possibly offer. while parts of the book were not as well developed as they perhaps might have been, *ricochet river* does exude a certain charm (even if the ending was somewhat predictable). cody succeeds in capturing the essence of small town living, as well as the inevitable angst plaguing its young inhabitants. among the work's notable qualities are its vivid portrayal of the breathtaking cascadian landscape and the richness and depth cody lent the three main characters.

Pam Wells says

I'll say this up front: I love this book. It surprised me how much I love this book. It's set in 1960 (not an era I'd normally turn to for my fiction) in a small town in Oregon—the fictional town of Calamus, we're told, but

it's fixed in the real forest east of Portland near the Clackamas and Columbia Rivers. It's fixed in the real history, too, of the Pacific Northwest, with the decline of logging as a way of life, the effects of river dams on salmon and the Indians who fished for them, and the attitudes of white and Indian cultures toward each other and toward the land.

At the heart of the story, though, are the characters of Wade, Lorna, and Jesse. Wade is a high school senior who can't decide what he wants to do with his life. He's good in school, good in sports, comes from a good home, but he's good and confused. Lorna is his longtime girlfriend; she's smart but feels as if the walls of Calamus are closing in on her. Jesse has just moved to Calamus from the Warm Springs Reservation to spend his senior year at the high school; he's a gifted athlete but lives recklessly—Wade would call it "bass-ackwards"—and has trouble staying out of trouble. Jesse, in fact, is the fulcrum for just about everything that happens. Some of what happens is what you'd expect—it's high school—and some of it surprising as they explore the world around them.

I think what really connected with the most was the voice of the narrator, Wade. He's open and sincere and sometimes a bit clueless. For instance, when he first meets Jesse and Jesse makes a suggestive remark about Lorna, Wade freezes and thinks to himself—

"Situations like this you see all the time in movies. Some drunk insults your woman and you deck him with one punch—*pflatt*—or send him spinning out through the swinging saloon doors. But when it actually comes up... the trouble is, thinking about it. You have to just do it, not think about it. Will it hurt my hand? What if he gets up? By the time it dawned on me this was real life, my timing was way off."

Ricochet River does feel like real life. Even if it's 1960.
